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ABSTRACT

Customarily, several parent figures rear black infants. The effects of this practice on infant-parent attachments have not been studied even though they provide the chance to test the attachment theory contention that infants form a primary attachment when several attachment figures are available. To study this issue, 21 male and 16 female black 12-month-olds from nonindigent families, their mothers, father figures and a stranger were videotaped in a 13-episode separation-reunion session. Infant behaviors rated were proximity seeking, contact maintaining, contact resisting, avoidance, distress at parents' leavings, exploration and sociability with a stranger. Infant-mother and infant-father behaviors were found indistinguishable, suggesting there was no single, primary infant-parent attachment. Moreover, infants were responsive to parents' whereabouts on only one attachment behavior measure. Girls were distressed when alone with the stranger, but boys were not. Exploration, however, was a clear indicator of parents' and the stranger's presence; it was greatest when both parents were present and least when the infant and stranger were alone. The results reveal that two parent figures have equivalent effects on the attachment, sociability, and exploratory behaviors of 12-month-old black infants in a laboratory setting, and have distinctive effects on exploratory behavior. (Author)

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# The Effects of Two Parent Figures on Attachment, Exploratory and Sociability Behaviors of Black Infants

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## Abstract

Customarily, several parent figures rear black infants. The effects of this practice on infant-parent attachments have not been studied even though they provide the chance to test the attachment theory contention that infants form a primary attachment when several attachment figures are available. To study this issue, 21 male and 16 female black 12-month-olds from nonindigent families, their mothers, father figures and a stranger were videotaped in a 13 episode separation-reunion session. Infant behaviors rated were proximity seeking, contact maintaining, contact resisting, avoidance, distress at parents' leavings ,exploration and sociability with a stranger.

Infant-mother and infant-father behaviors were found indistinguishable suggesting there was no single, primary infant-parent attachment. Moreover, infants were responsive to parents' whereabouts on only one attachment behavior measure. Girls were distressed when alone with the stranger, but boys were not. Exploration, however, was a clear indicator of parents' and the stranger's presence; it was greatest when both parents were present and least when the infant and stranger were alone. The results reveal that two parent figures have equivalent effects on attachment, sociability, and exploratory behaviors of 12 month old black infants in a laboratory setting, and have distinctive effects on exploratory behavior.

## Aims

1) To compare black infants' experimentally induced responses to their two main parent figures.

2) To determine the effects of independent and conjoint presence of two parent figures on infants' attachment, sociability and exploratory behaviors.

3) To identify patterns of attachment, sociability and exploratory behaviors that give a characterization of a sample of healthy black infants from nonindigent families.

4) To identify patterns of individual differences in attachment, sociability and exploratory behaviors in black infants.

## Method

Subjects: Twenty-one male and 16 female 12-month-olds, their mothers and second parent figures were recruited at random using local birth records. Thirty-two came from two-parent families and the father participated as the second parent figure; five came from single parent families and a female relative participated as the second parent figure. ( All second parent figures will be referred to as fathers hereafter.)

Separation-Reunion Session: Subjects participated in a videotaped, 13 episode separation-reunion session in a laboratory playroom with a black female adult stranger. Each episode was three minutes long. Mother's, father's and stranger's presence and absence were manipulated and the order of parents' departures was counterbalanced. Ratings of infants' behavior in pertinent episodes were made for proximity seeking, contact maintaining, contact resisting, avoidance, distress at parents' leavings, exploration and sociability with the stranger.

## Separation-Reunion Session
## People in Playroom

| Episode | Mother Departing First | Father Departing First |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | infant, mother, father | infant, mother, father |
| 2 | infant, father | infant, mother |
| 3 | infant, father, stranger | infant, mother, stranger |
| 4 | infant, stranger | infant, stranger |
| 5 | infant, stranger, mother | infant, stranger, father |
| 6 | infant, mother | infant, father |
| 7 | infant, mother, father | infant, father, mother |
| 8 | infant, mother | infant, father |
| 9 | infant, mother, stranger | infant, father, stranger |
| 10 | infant, stranger | infant, stranger |
| 11 | infant, stranger, father | infant, stranger, mother |
| 12 | infant, father | infant, mother |
| 13 | infant, father, mother | infant, mother, father |

**Note:** "Father" refers to any one of the 37 second parent figures who participated in the study.

## Results

1) Comparison of infant-mother and infant-father behaviors revealed similarity of infants' responses to parents. Correlations of mother related and father related scores for six of the seven behaviors rated ranged from .34 to .66 and were statistically significant. None of seven matched pair t-tests based on the difference of mother related and father related scores were significant, indicating an absence of detectable response biases.

2) Infants were responsive to separations from parents, but not to reunions. A statistically significant comparison of behaviors in specific episodes revealed that girls were more distressed when left alone with the stranger ( in episodes 4 and 10) than when left alone with one parent ( episodes 2 and 8 ):

$\Psi$ dis-g = $\bar{R}_2 + \bar{R}_8 - \bar{R}_4 - \bar{R}_{10} + SE_\Psi$ = 1.88 + 2.19 - 2.88 - 3.06 + (1.63) = - 1.87 + (1.63) = -.24. Boys, however, did not show this contrast in distress behavior . Comparisons of infants' proximity seeking and avoidance behaviors toward a parent after having been alone with the stranger ( episodes 5 and 11 ) with behaviors toward a returning parent after having been with the second parent ( episodes 7 and 13 ) revealed no significant contrast in behavior ( i.e. the infants did not react more strongly to the absence of both parents ). Comparisons of infants' contact maintaining and contact resisting behaviors toward a parent after having been alone with the stranger ( episodes 5 and 11 ) with behaviors in episodes extending time in the playroom when at least one parent had been present ( episodes 6,7,8,12 and 13 ) also failed to reveal significant contrasts in behavior.

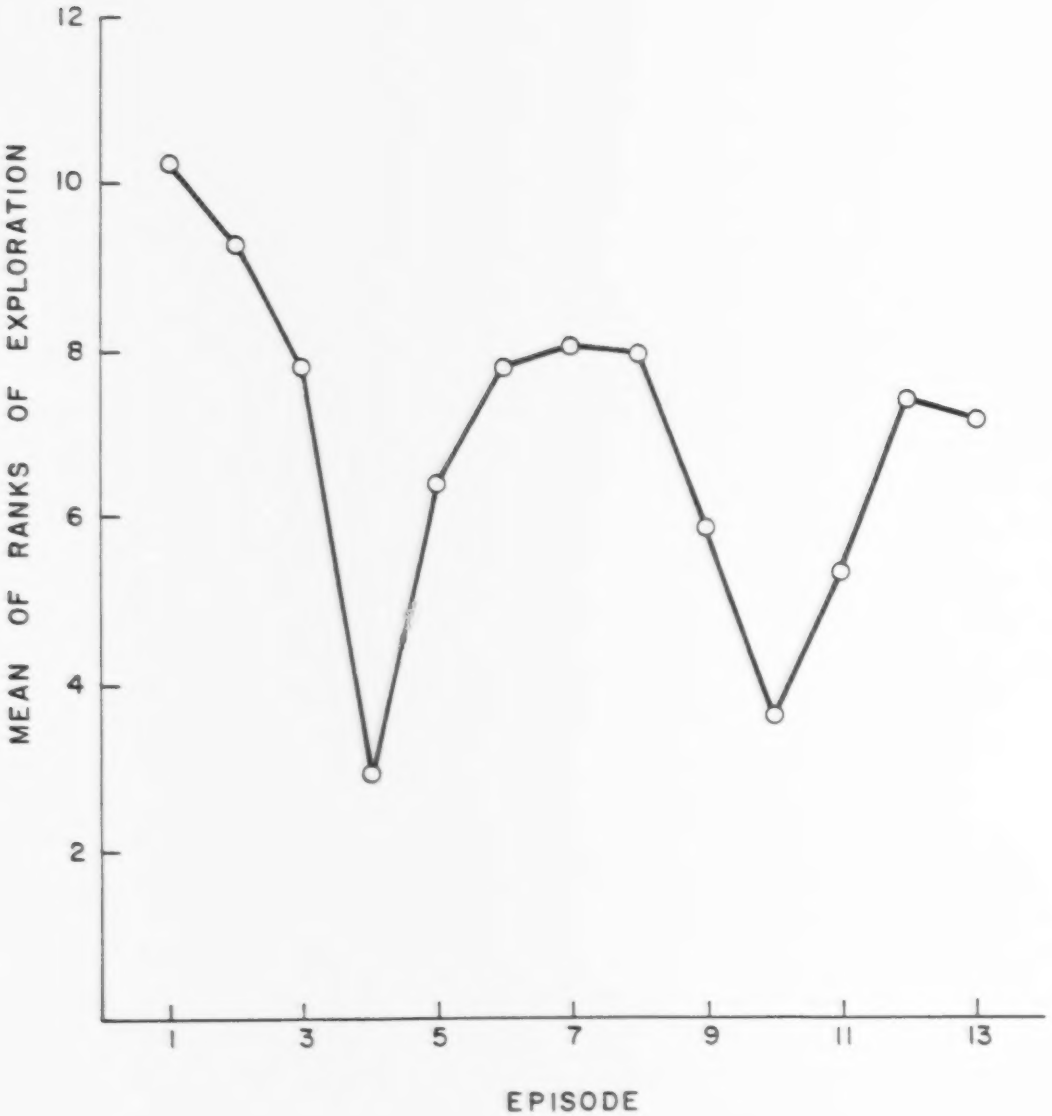
## Results-continued

3) Infants' responses to the stranger did not vary as a function of the manipulation of parents' presence and absence. A comparison of infants' sociability when one parent was present to reponses when the infant and stranger were alone revealed no statistically significant contrast in behavior.

4) Changes in infants' exploratory behaviors across the episodes of the session revealed that the infants were highly responsive to the manipulations of parents' and the strangers' presence. Exploratory behavior in all 13 episodes of the session was examined to detect a quartic trend. The statistically significant result indicated that parents' presence facilitated exploration and stranger presence hindered exploration.

$\psi_{expl} = 99\bar{R}_1 - 66\bar{R}_2 - 96\bar{R}_3 - 54\bar{R}_4 + 11\bar{R}_5 + 64\bar{R}_6 + 84\bar{R}_7 + 64\bar{R}_8 + 11\bar{R}_9 - 54\bar{R}_{10} - 96\bar{R}_{11} - 66\bar{R}_{12} + 99\bar{R}_{13}$ - $SE_\psi$ = 99(10.28) -66(9.35) - 96(7.89) -54(3.47) +11(6.42) + 64(7.89) + 84(8.03) +64(8.00) +11(5.99) - 54(3.62) -96(5.31) -66(7.46) +99(7.18) -(719.45) = 797.01 - (719.45) = 77.56.

5) Intercorrelations of the seven behaviors rated revealed patterns of individual differences for behaviors measured. For individuals, attachment and exploratory behaviors were related. Infants who explored the most had the lowest scores on proximity seeking ( r= -.32 ) and contact maintaining ( r= -.46) and were the least distressed ( r= -.39 ). The data also suggested that the infants who explored the most were more sociable ( r= .26, p= .06 ).


MEAN OF RANKS OF EXPLORATION
12
10
8
6
4
2
1
3
5
7
9
11
13
EPISODE

## Conclusions

1) For healthy black 12-month-olds from nonindigent families, two parent figures have equivalent effects on attachment, sociability and exploratory behaviors. This finding gives reason to question the attachment theory contention that all infants form one primary attachment when several attachment figures are available.

2) For black infants, the exploratory behavioral system is more strongly affected by manipulations of parents' and a strangers' presence and absence than the attachment behavioral system. Nonetheless, the responsiveness of girls to parents' departures indicates that the laboratory procedure did activate the attachment behavioral system for some of the infants.

3) Individual infants' overall response to the laboratory session varied such that some infants ventured out from parents and were gregarious, while others were wary and remained close to parents. This finding warrants further study to determine differences in underlying infant temperament and qualitative differences in infant-parent relations associated with laboratory response patterns.

4) Study results demonstrate the usefulness of combining exploratory, sociability and attachment behavior measures for delineating response patterns of black infants in an experimental separation-reunion session.